IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 61 to 76 without prejudice, and amend the claims as follows:

1-39. (Cancelled)

40. (Currently Amended) A device for the isolation and/or purification of nucleic acid molecules comprising at least two layers, a first layer being adapted to bind or inactivate inhibitors of the activity of reagents or enzymes used in nucleic acid manipulation, wherein said first layer comprises polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP) or polyvinylpolypyrrolidone (PVPP), and wherein said first layer further comprises a sample loading means in an array in an upper portion of the first layer, defining an array of columns, each column being capable of isolating nucleic acid molecules, and a second layer being adapted to separate a plurality of nucleic acid molecules with respect to their size, and wherein said first layer is a first phase of a gel and said second layer is a second phase of said gel, wherein said first layer is arranged above the second layer, and wherein said second layer is substantially free of PVP when said first layer comprises PVP, and wherein said second layer is substantially free of PVPP when said first layer comprises PVPP.

41. (Cancelled)

42. (Original) The device of claim 40, wherein said gel is an agarose gel or a polyacrylamide gel.

43. (Previously Presented) The device of claim 40, wherein said first layer further comprises CTAB, EDTA, EGTA, cyclodextrins, proteins, (poly)peptides, antibodies, aptamers, lectins, nucleic acids or an ion-exchanger.

44. (Previously Presented) The device of claim 40, wherein said second layer is substantially free of CTAB, EDTA, EGTA, cyclodextrins, proteins, (poly)peptides, aptamers, antibodies, lectins, nucleic acids or an ion-exchanger.

45. (Original) The device of claim 40, wherein the device is electrically biased to enhance flow of at least one sample through the layers.

46-52. (Cancelled)

53. (Previously Presented) The device of claim 40, wherein said first or second layer further comprises agarose, dextran, an acrylamide based resin or acrylamide.

54. (Original) The device of claim 40, wherein said nucleic acid molecule is DNA or RNA.

55. (Original) The device of claim 54, wherein said DNA is genomic DNA.

56. (Original) The device of claim 54, wherein said nucleic acid molecule is derived from (micro)organisms of soil, sediments, water or symbiotic/parasitic consortia.

57. (Original) The device of claim 56, wherein said (micro)organisms are (micro)organisms of aquatic plancton, microbial mats, clusters, sludge flocs, or biofilms.

58. (Original) The device of claim 56, wherein said (micro)organism are isolated as consortia of coexisting species.

59. (Original) The device of claim 54, wherein said nucleic acid molecules represent a fraction of the metagenome of a given habitat.

60. (Withdrawn) A method for the isolation of a nucleic acid molecule comprising applying a sample to the device as defined in claim 40.

61–76. (Cancelled)